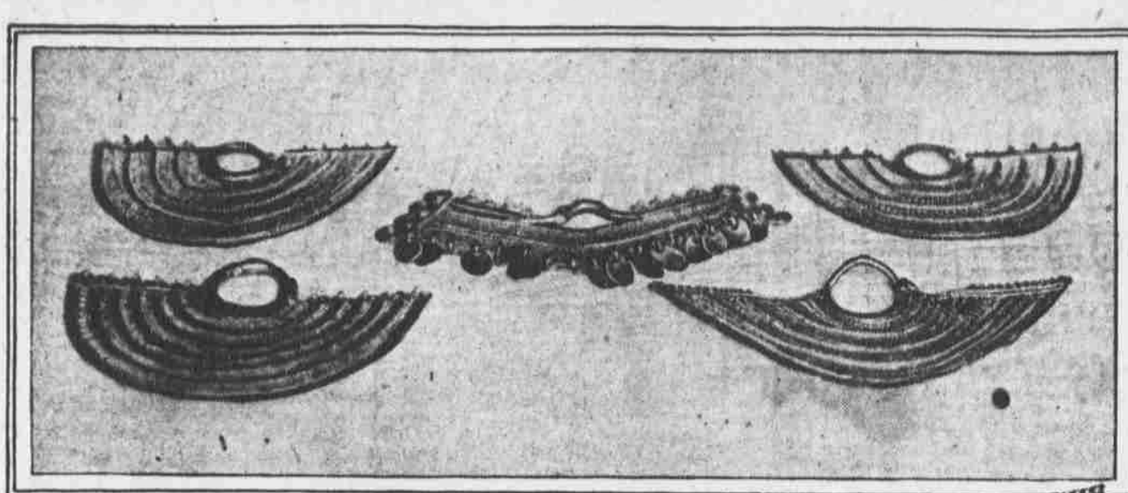
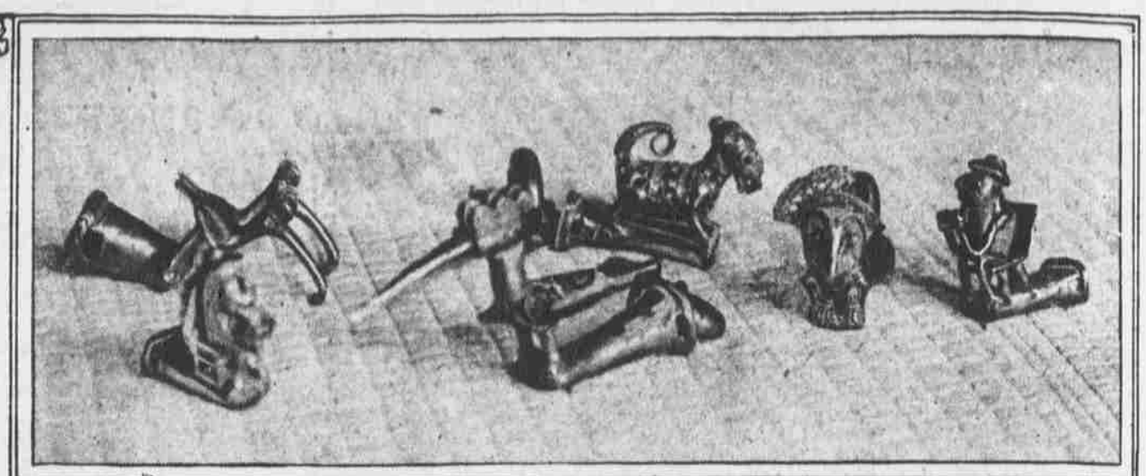
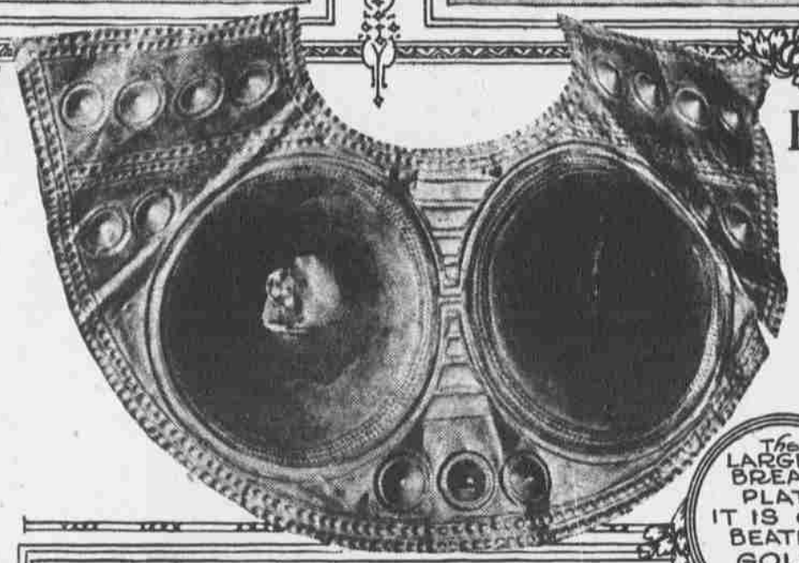
Priceless Golden Relics From Graves of Ancient Chibchas



EARRINGS from The CHIBCHA GRAVE..



TIPS OR HEADS for STOVES or SCEPTRES...



VIEW of The ENTIRE COLLECTION EXCEPT SEVERAL ROLLS of BEATEN GOLD SHEETS

Marvellous Workmanship Betokens High Civilization of Race Whose History Is Lost in Antiquity

By M. A. ROSE.

THERE the treasure lay, spread out upon the long table in the dining room of an ultra modern apartment in unromantic West End avenue. Taxicabs squawked on the icy asphalt below; now and again the elevator whined its way past the floor; the telephone rang once or twice. But our thoughts were thousands of miles and six centuries away. We were thinking of Columbus and Alonzo de Objeda and Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada; of Yeo and Amyas Leigh in *Westward Ho;* of rotting skeletons beneath tall palms and swinging orchids, the bones of men who had crossed the Spanish Main and died in search for just such glittering stuff as lay before us.

Gold! Not the minted tokens of a Government's solvency upon which rests the inverted pyramid of modern commerce, nor yet such melted down bars as are corded up so neatly in the vaults at Wall and Nassau streets.

This was Chibcha gold. Breastplates, aprons, bracelets, nose rings, sceptre heads, chimes; the loot of a chieftain's or princess's grave in the mountains of Antioquia, Colombia—the New Grenada of the days of the Conquest.

It is (this on the word of competent archæologists) the greatest collection of pre-Conquest gold ever assembled; it is, in fact, almost the only collection of any pretension. And just now it is in New York.

Cannot Be Valued.

What is it worth? Let us answer, Yankee fashion, with another question: What would Solomon's crown be worth if it were found?

The answer to one question is as difficult as another. Religious veneration would make Solomon's crown worth more than its weight in gold; on the other hand, we know a great deal about the history, the arts, the civilization of Solomon's race. This heap of treasure, newly found, represents almost all we know perhaps, nearly all we ever will know, about a race which had attained in some respects as high a degree of civilization as the ancient Hebrews. Who shall put a price upon it?

But if you insist upon sordid details the collection, fifty-two major pieces, weighs sixteen troy pounds, all pure gold!

The Muyscas, or Chibchas, were a race of unknown antiquity. Their descendants live to-day in Colombia, but their traditions tell us little and their forebears left no written records. It is known, however, that prior to the Spanish Conquest they lived in settled communities, mostly in the mountainous regions back from the coast. Their civilization was akin to that of the Incas of Peru, and not dissimilar to that of the Aztecs, Mayas, Toltecs and Zapotecs of Mexico and Central America.

The Chibchas worshipped the god Memterequeteba as being the author of their civilization, and they were ruled by three independent chieftains—the Zipa of Muequeta (now Funza), the Zaque of Hunsa (now called Tunja) and the Jeque of Irica. Then there were lesser chieftains, but not many. The race was never, it seems, strong in numbers.

Unlike the Incas, the Chibchas have left no massive buildings, no temples, no roads. But in the graves of their priests, their chiefs and their princesses they left gold ornaments and implements which equal in skill and beauty of workmanship and design anything the Incas made. Indeed, it is almost impossible to tell Chibcha gold relics from Inca gold, and that leads the archæologist to the natural deduction that there was close communication between the races. It is, in fact, a theory, widely accepted, that at one prehistoric time the Chibchas were the central link in a close knit chain between the Incas on the south and the Aztecs and Toltecs on the north. Everything points to this; scraps of tradition, similarity of religion, of customs, and above all virtual identity of craftsmanship as developed by their goldsmiths.

Their love of gold was chaste and pure; there was no taint of commercialism or cupidity in it. Gold was to them merely a thing of beauty. It had no commercial value; copper was the more highly prized, for they knew how to make tools from copper. Gold was to them what the plumage of birds is to us—merely the material from which things of beauty could be made.

They swathed their dead in leaves and grass and buried them in graves, not in tombs. With their important dignitaries they buried their possessions. Very likely their Cæsars, their Alexanders and Cleopatras were arrayed in all their panoply of pomp and circumstance when they were lowered into the bosom of the earth. So they went on, generation after generation, for centuries, perhaps for thousands of years.

Then came the Spaniards. Alonzo de Ojeda touched the coast of Colombia in 1499-1501. Columbus touched it on his last voyage in 1502. Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada landed in 1536-37, and penetrated to Bogota, the capital of the Chibchas. Then came the hordes of adventures lured by the one lure—gold!

Cartagena was founded in 1533 by Pedro de Heredia, and it came in time to be the seat of a tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition. Drake held the town to ransom in 1586, and Pointis did the trick again in 1697—always for gold.

The Spaniards forced the Indians to mine it at the end of the lash, and, prodded from behind by pikes bound together with chains, made them carry it down to the sea coast and aboard galleons, and at the lash end, too, they made the Indians tell where their graves were and dig them up for the gold ornaments.

Archæologists! Not for a minute. They melted up these priceless relics of an ancient civilization in the same pot with the gold dust from the rivers and shipped it all to the Infantas.

Even the Inquisition helped—

"Turn Christian, dog of an infidel"—and incidentally lead us to treasure for Rome.

Chibcha Civilization Passes.

The Chibcha civilization crumbled beneath the Spanish heel just as did the Incas' wonderful combination of communism and benevolent despotism. The Spaniards stopped to study the Incas as foes worthy of their mettle. But they paid no attention to the weak Chibchas who fell so easily before them. Squeezed, the country yielded gold; that was enough. In the five hundred years since the Spaniards came, Colombia has yielded up $128,000,000 of the metal, it is estimated; but it cannot be an accurate estimate, for who keeps accurate tally of loot?

The metal still pours out. The Indian in his remote settlement still washes the river sand in his primitive basin and trades the dust for his necessities. Huge modern dredges scoop up the bottoms of lakes to fill the pockets of British investors. There are quartz stamping mills here and there. Only a beginning has been made. Much of Colombia never has been explored. It is deadly to the white man—neither the climate nor poisoned arrows seem to agree with the Caucasian constitution.

There are few railroads. There are parts of Colombia where every handful of gravel yields yellow flakes of treasure. But whether the deposits can be worked commercially, that is, on a large scale, cannot be known until the country is opened up. Platinum, too—Colombia's exports of platinum are second only to Russia's. But a lot the Chibchas cared about platinum.

The Spaniards swept as clean as they could, but they couldn't find every Chibcha grave. So nowadays, in the interior of mountainous Antioquia, it is a custom to stake an Indian or a half breed to "grub and clothes" and send him out to search for buried treasure. It is a trade, almost.

The graves are *tunjos;* the searchers are *tunjeros;* they seek *huacas,* which means "buried gold things." It is like digging for Capt. Kidd's treasure, a favorite Long Island sport, except that the *tunjeros* usually find something, if only a little. It is again like grubstaking the Western prospector. Thus Aurelio Gutierrez of Ayapel kept grubstaking *tunjeros* for five years. They brought back small pieces now and then; enough to keep up his interest, but never anything of importance.

Early in 1919 they were exploring likely looking spots in the neighborhood of Ayapel, a village whose Indian name means, appropriately enough, "land of gold," and with practised eyes were spying out the indications of early Chibcha occupancy. The *tunjeros* can tell where the graves ought to be, and into such spots they plunge long pointed rods. If they strike solid objects six or eight feet down, well, the chance of treasure is worth a little work with a shovel. It may prove to be the grave of a poor Chibcha who took nothing with him into the earth except his blanket, long since rotted, and his carcass, long since wasted to a few bones.

But in this particular grave they made the richest find ever unearthed in all the history of treasure hunting since the early Conquest period. Sixty-eight or seventy pieces, to be precise.

Senor Gutierrez was delighted; he might well have been. Here was something worth while. It occurred to him, too, that the stuff was worth more in its original form than melted down into bullion. But where would he dispose of it?

Some Americans offered to bring it to the United States and divide with him all that the collection brought above the bullion value (the bullion value also going to him, of course). He thought the proposal was equitable, but he didn't know the Americans very well.

About one-fourth of the collection (sixteen pieces) eventually was sold to a man who sold it to William Wrigley, Jr. Mr. Wrigley turned the objects over to the Field Museum in Chicago. In appreciation, F. W. Skiff, curator, wrote to Mr. Wrigley that the museum regarded it as "a unique treasure of intense scientific and artistic interest," and that "it surpasses in value any pre-Colombian collection of ornaments in any of the great museums of Europe or those now shown in Field Museum. It will be advisable for obvious reasons to omit any reference to the intrinsic value of the material."

The remaining fifty-two pieces (not to count some fragments) Senor Gutierrez took to Barranquilla and after some difficulty interested Ernesto Cortissoz, head of the principal bank of Barranquilla. Senor Cortissoz was coming to the United States as one of the Colombian delegation to the Pan-American Financial Congress which was held recently in Washington and he agreed to bring the treasure to New York. He hoped that here he might at least interest archæologists. They could give him an appraisal of the value of the treasure; they might learn much from the study of it; perhaps the Metropolitan or the Hispanic or American Museum of Natural History might wish to acquire the collection, or a part of it.

Experts Declare Treasure Now in New York Is Greatest Pre-Conquest Collection in the World

In Love With Treasure.

If not Senor Cortissoz was half determined to acquire the objects for himself. He has fallen in love with the beauty of the things; he will not enjoy parting with them. And no wonder!

Most gorgeous of all are the breastplates, eight of them. Some are thirty inches across, great blazing yellow suns, ornately embossed with designs of crocodiles and serpents. Others are sixteen inches in diameter, with beautiful work in repousse.

More exquisite in taste and infinitely more difficult of execution are the filigree earrings. Wonderful things, these, of barbaric splendor. Four inches from tip to tip, across the diameter of a semicircle. At first glance, the design seems to be made of seven strips of gold lace, fairy-like in delicacy. But lift one! No modern skimping of material in these pieces. The ancient artisan has used at least $100 worth of the virgin metal for this single piece. The meshes of the lace are not gold wire, skilfully soldered. The whole ornament is one integral chunk of metal, the filigree painfully cut out by sharp tools.

Of Appeal to Any Woman.

The thing is amazing. It is not simply interesting, but like so many relics of the past, it is beautiful. There isn't a woman in New York, from Mott or Essex street to Fifth avenue, who wouldn't exclaim over it. Primitive art, indeed! The thing is as modern in its appeal as anything from Tiffany's.

So with the strings of gold beads, where a dainty filigree ball alternates with a plain bead; or where a heavy little cross like a child's jackstone alternates with a plain bead. Or where twenty-six tiny bells of beautiful, faint tone, each a little larger than a BB shot, are spaced with beads of coiled gold wire.

Then two strings of bells of solid, polished gold; heavy to the hand; the bells are an inch long each and three-quarters of an inch in diameter, eleven in number on one string, thirteen on the other, spaced with little tubes of gold. These went round the thighs and chimed as the wearer moved, it is believed. Incidentally, a 24 carat gold bell is as sweet in tone as a silver bell, which is a thing few of us knew, or were likely to find out.

Then there's an amusing little monkey, sitting in a chair—a perfect little chair no different from the ones we use to-day; wearing a sort of broad brimmed hat and holding the half of a cocoanut shell beneath his chin, while his elbows rest on his knees. The whole thing is an inch or so high and an inch and a half long. It fitted on the end of a staff or sceptre.

Staff Tips Exquisite Animals.

Other staff tips are fashioned like birds with long and crooked bills. Senor Cortissoz says some of them are perfectly recognizable as species still to be found in Colombia. There is a filigree jaguar, an inch long; it also was a sceptre tip. There are frogs or buckles of gold, heavy as any two signet rings you ever "hefted."

One earring, and only one, is ornamented with bangles that tinkle charmingly. Above the row of bangles are two rows of the exquisite gold lace which isn't lace at all, but a lattice cut from the solid piece of metal, and held in a frame of elaborate scroll work.

There's an opulent nose piece, like a crescent moon with the tips incurved so they almost touch. There is not a scroll or a scratch or an ornament upon it. It was intended, doubtless, to flash in the rays of the sun like a mirror, when the wearer's lips moved. Like everything else, it is twice as thick as it need be to get the effect; economy of the metal was no part of the Chibchas' concern.

Finally, there are rolls of sheet gold; many square feet of it. In the grave it lay about one skeleton as though it had been a robe. A shroud of gold——

Linking Bedloe's Island to the Marne

MacMonnies Statue, America's Gift to France, and Bartholdi's Goddess of Liberty to Uphold Rainbow of International Sympathy

THE Statue of Liberty soon will be the American pillar of a bridge across the Atlantic. The other end will be another colossal statue which is planned to stand near the little French village of Meaux, on the Marne, on a site to be selected by Foch and Joffre. The bridge will be a rainbow of sympathy and international hope; across the ocean will reach a span of sympathy.

The figure of "Liberty Enlightening the World" was brought from France in 1885; the statue which is to be America's gift to France will be carried from America to the Marne. M. Bartholdi, the French sculptor born in Alsace, conceived the form of the goddess on Bedloe's Island; Frederick MacMonnies, the American sculptor who did his early work in France, will undertake the task of making a memorial for the unviolated spot near the Meaux bridge, which the Kaiser never crossed.

In providing the $250,000 necessary for this gift to France Americans may choose to follow the example of the Frenchmen who contributed to the fund for the Statue of Liberty. It is an interesting story simply told by Frederic Auguste Bartholdi. Of the conception of the idea he wrote:

"One evening twenty years ago I had been dining at the home of my late lamented and illustrious friend M. Laboulaye, and his guests were smoking in the conservatory of his charming retreat, Glavigny, near Versailles.

"It was a gathering of men eminent in politics and letters. The talk fell upon international relations, upon the sentiments of Italy toward France. Some one said that gratitude could not exist among nations, that the least material interest, that the lightest political breath would break every tie of that sort. Coming to the United States, the remark was added that France could no more count on the remembrance of the past.

Where Sympathy Rests.

"M. Laboulaye observed that in the case of Italy there had never been a popular tradition of friendship; that in 1859 a service had been done her, but she had been made to feel that France had repaid herself for it; and that fact was sufficient to make the remembrance unpleasant to the Italians. It was a wholly different thing in the case of other nations or peoples with whom there was a genuine flow of sympathy, caused, it might be, by experiences common to the two nations; it might be by affinity of aspiration or by the influence of certain feelings which served as a bond of union.

"Coming to the American nation, he said that it had more sympathy for France than for any other European nation; that this sentiment did not bear the stamp of gratitude, but was based upon the remembrance of the community of thoughts and struggles sustained with common aspirations.

"The Frenchmen who fought in the United States spilled their blood for the principles that they hoped to see prevail in France and in the world. The first volunteers went away in spite of the Government, and all the world recalls the difficulties encountered by Lafayette at his departure. There is, then, he said, in that struggle for independence not a simple service rendered to a friendly nation but a fraternity of feelings, a community of efforts and of emotions; and when hearts have beaten together something always remains among nations as among individuals."

Conceived by Bartholdi, the statue was made possible largely through donations voted in France by 180 cities, forty general councils, a large number of chambers of commerce and societies and more than a hundred thousand individual subscribers.

From the amount thus raised the artist received not a sou. His was a labor of love.

Born for the Place.

"The statue was born for this place," said Bartholdi. "May God be pleased to bless my efforts and my work and to crown it with the success, the duration and the moral influence which it ought to have. I shall be happy to have been able to consecrate the best years of my life to being the interpreter of the noble hearts whose dream has been the realization of the monument to the French-American union."

Frederick MacMonnies, the sculptor, is to chisel our own similar thoughts toward France in stone on the Marne. To the French an American statue on the Marne will mean more than any treaty. It will mean a great deal more to them and to the United States if the subscriptions are popular. That is the reason the committee of "America's Gift to France" is asking every man, woman and child to give something toward the $250,000. All expenses of the collection have been underwritten. As for the statue itself, the cost of that gift must be borne by the pennies and nickels and dimes of the boys and girls and mothers and fathers of the nation.